





# RANCH LIFE

Dubbed the HOTEL OF GOOD TIMES, new Byron estate SUN RANCH lives up to its moniker

**Y**ou'll know when you reach Sun Ranch, because a nine-by-five-metre sign scrawled in *Pulp Fiction* font looms large overhead. You could be driving into a Quentin Tarantino crime scene, but then again, step into the lobby and the moody colour and curiosities feel more like a Wes Anderson dream sequence. Broad-brimmed hats hang on panelled timber walls, reminiscent of a ranch deep in the Californian desert, yet look outside and pink galahs and wallabies dot the landscape. It would all feel a little bit eerie if it weren't so, well, fun. "We wanted to be a bit tongue in cheek," says hotelier Julia Ashwood, who co-founded the property with a collective of friends from the creative and hospitality industries. "Let's push the unexpected nature of this, you know?"

Since opening its doors earlier this month, Sun Ranch has delivered on that M.O. and then some. Set over 22 hectares in the Byron Bay Hinterland, it sleeps 34 across the Long House – an adults-only lair with a 'cowboy bar', a sunken communal lounge-cum-conversation pit, and nudge-and-wink room names like Saddle Up and The Wam Bam – plus six two-bedroom, off-grid barns.





“The  
SUNKEN  
lounge area  
inspired  
the whole  
property.  
You can feel  
the SPIRIT of  
celebration.”

**CREATIVE SPIRIT**  
Sun Ranch hoteliers and  
designers Jamie Blakey  
and Julia Ashwood.



Luxe textures of terracotta and stone are offset by surfaces swathed in recycled European oak; rich, custom-created Porter's Paints hues splash the walls; and there's a sense of the unexpected at every turn. It's a quirky contrast from the breezily beautiful but same-y abodes that saturate the area, and marks the culmination of a two-year design project for Ashwood and Sun Ranch co-founder Jamie Blakey, former creative director and founder of One Teaspoon.

"We went to LA and Mexico for a sourcing trip and ended up with a whole shipping container," recalls Blakey. "Our brief to ourselves was that we wanted unique pieces – any piece of furniture had to have personality. We used lots of vintage, and focused on local makers." Adds Ashwood, "We found pieces that just ignite your soul, you know?," gesturing to a dramatic beaded pendant by Australian artist Lana Launay, who created all the statement lighting.

The little details that surprise and delight aren't just aesthetic, but experiential too. "We built this place considering our friendship group – we thought about how our bunch of mates would love to experience and utilise the spaces," says Blakey. "On arrival, you'll get a salty margarita or an icy cold beer. You might just want to dump your bags and go straight to the Pool Club. Or you can go to the field for lawn games."





“It was an old farming property, so we’ve PLANTED more than 10,000 native trees.”



#### COWBOY-CATION

The property’s sun-soaked spaces come with a side of wit.

You could also partake in a spot of badminton, go horse riding, sweat it out in the woodfired floating sauna before diving into the dam, or canoe languidly down Byron Creek under a canopy of green. If you’re more spiritually inclined, there’s a menu of Cosmic Cowboy experiences to book, from astrology readings to sound healing, massage and cacao ceremonies. “We’re leaning into the Byron-ness a bit, and everything we do will have that ranch, cosmic appeal,” says Ashwood. “We’ve even set the calendars and are living by the moon. Out here, the stars are insanely beautiful – yet you’re only 15 minutes from the centre of Byron Bay. So you can go clubbing in town if you want, but once you’re here you probably won’t even think about that.”

The farm-to-table fare is one reason not to leave. “It’s how we feed your soul when you arrive on the ranch,” notes Ashwood. “We’ve got chef Pip Sumbak creating feasts every day, and the smells just waft out of smoky ovens and outdoor fires. It’s a seasonal menu pulling from our edible garden, and every morning, there’s a steaming hot basket of muffins left at your door.” *Good morning you hot muffin*, quips an accompanying note.

It’s good old-fashioned hospitality that’s been undone and ruffled just so – this is, after all, the Hotel of Good Times, as confirmed by the slogan on the robe you’ll slip into after a night spent listening to old records and imbibing at the Whiskey Bar. “At Sun Ranch, we don’t take life too seriously,” says Ashwood. “You come here and we’re going to nourish you, make you feel incredible, have a great time and be in nature. Experience all the ranch has to offer, and come back soon.” ■